Before adjourning on December 9, the 109th Congress passed a Continuing Resolution (CR) to fund non-defense, non-homeland security government programs until February 15, 2007—meaning that LHHS programs such as NIH/NEI are funded at the FY2006 level. Although this level is higher than that in the unpassed FY2007 House bill (see funding chart), the uncertainty of a final funding level creates major delays in NEI grant awards. Additionally, NIH Director Dr. Zerhouni has suspended any inflationary increase to existing grants to ensure adequate dollars for new investigator-initiated grants.

New 110th Congress Appropriations Committee Chairs Sen. Robert Byrd (D-WV) and Cong. David Obey (D-WI) have expressed an intention to pass a year-long CR to fund most domestic programs, including LHHS. Although the Democratic leadership has traditionally supported LHHS programs as a priority, it faces a variety of significant, competing funding requests, as well as a campaign promise to control spending and reduce the deficit.

With its medical advocacy colleagues, NAEVR has called upon appropriations leaders to “plus-up” NIH funding—even if a year-long CR is passed. In a January 9 letter, Dr. Ryan urged these leaders to champion an FY2007 NIH increase “especially due to the strong statements made in the Senate and House Budget Resolutions to add $7 billion for LHHS programs and the mandate to increase NIH funding in the recently passed reauthorization bill.”